

DNR Response to Public Comments on Section 1 of the Draft Michigan State Forest Management Plan

December 27, 2007

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) received twelve comments that were directed to Section 1 (Components of the State Forest Plan) of the DRAFT Michigan State Forest Management Plan. Most comments focused on the concept of ecosystem management, the vision and the strategic goals for the State Forest. A response to these comments follows.

The DNR began to develop strategies for sustainable resource planning and management in 1997 with a program known as Joint Ventures. To implement this program the DNR appointed ecoregional management teams (eco-teams) in 2000. The mission of eco-teams is to plan and coordinate management of Michigan's natural resources, utilizing ecosystem management principles. At that time eight concepts of ecosystem management (as described by the Ecological Society of America) were endorsed by the DNR. These concepts are:

1. **Sustainability:** Ecosystem management does not focus primarily on deliverables but rather regards intergenerational sustainability as a precondition.
2. **Goals:** Ecosystem management establishes measurable goals that specify future processes and outcomes necessary for sustainability.
3. **Sound Ecological Models and Understanding:** Ecosystem management relies on research performed at all levels of ecological organization.
4. **Complex and Connectedness:** Ecosystem management recognizes that biological diversity and structural complexity strengthen ecosystems against disturbance and supply the genetic resources necessary to adapt to long-term change.
5. **The Dynamic Character of Ecosystems:** Recognizing that change and evolution are inherent in ecosystem sustainability, ecosystem management avoids attempts to freeze ecosystems in a particular state of configuration.
6. **Context and Scale:** Ecosystem processes operate over a wide range of spatial and temporal scales, and their behavior at any given location is greatly affected by surrounding systems. Thus, there is no single appropriate scale or timeframe for management.
7. **Humans as Ecosystem Components:** Ecosystem management values the active role of humans in achieving sustainable management goals.
8. **Adaptability and Accountability:** Ecosystem management acknowledges that current knowledge and paradigms of ecosystem functions are provisional, incomplete, and subject to change. Management

approaches must be viewed as hypotheses to be tested by research and monitoring programs.

The concepts of ecosystem management are not new and have been accepted by many organizations including the Society of American Foresters (SAF) in their 1993 report on Sustaining Long-Term Forest Health and Productivity. The SAF holds that the objective process for ecosystem management will maintain ecological and desired forest conditions, within which the sustained-yield of products to meet human needs is achieved.

The concept of ecosystem management is thus linked to the concept of sustainability, which is hallmark of the two standards under which the DNR state forest is certified – the Sustainable Forestry Initiative and the Forest Stewardship Council. The certification of the state forest system was legislatively mandated in May of 2004 under Part 525, Sustainable Forestry on State Forestlands, of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act (NREPA), 1994 PA 451, as amended. The DNR must be able to demonstrate that the management of the State Forest is sustainable in order to maintain certification of forest operations. The measure of sustainability is compliance with the SFI and FSC certification standards, as assessed by annual third party audits.

Both Part 525 and the SFI and FSC certification standards require that the DNR develop a state forest plan. Both SFI and FSC have planning requirements but neither set of standards requires a **single** management plan. Both standards recognize planning and plans at different scales and intensities and allow a degree of flexibility in meeting their certification requirements.

The DNR has multiple planning processes and strategies concerning various resources at different scales and intensities. After a review of NREPA, current planning activities and the DNR's commitment to ecosystem management, the DNR laid out a tiered geographic planning framework that coordinates many planning activities. The framework consists of a state level plan [the State Forest Management Plan (SFMP)], regional plans (Eco-Region Plans) and local or small scale plans (activities in Compartment Review). Other planning efforts, such as Kirtland's Warbler restoration plan and Natural Rivers Plans, must be integrated as well. It should be noted that it is unrealistic to exhaustively include all plans in the SFMP, but the plan can provide a framework for planning. Accordingly, the timeframe for completion of the SFMP was shortened in order to provide broad guidance to the Eco-Regional plans that are currently under development.

The format of the State Forest Management Plan is similar to Eco-Region Forest Plans. The base of the SFMP however, is essentially a compilation of current statute, policy, strategies, other plans and science (social, economic and environment/natural resource). It collects many current management policies and practices in one place. The SFMP provides a platform for viewing a broad spectrum policies and management. It does not resolve conflicts or supersede

direction based on statute. It does make it easier to see conflicts between various resource objectives and identify gaps in policy and management. These conflicts are commonly a consequence of disparate direction that should be addressed in the policy arena.

One intention of the SFMP is to describe and frame current management direction and identify measurable goals that can be monitored and adjusted over time. Measurable goals may include numeric deliverables or outputs but also include qualitative and relational measures (i.e. staff will be adequately trained). Within the SFMP the DNR has outlined strategic goals (Section 1) and resource-specific goals (Section 4) to guide our steps towards sustainable, ecosystem-based management of DNR-owned forest lands. Under the concept of ecosystem management where ecological, social and economic aspects have equal emphasis, there is no expressed relative value or priority assigned to these goals.

The process for monitoring and amending management plans and the goals therein begins with the Management Review Process, the concept of which is outlined in Section 6 of the SFMP.

The vision for the State Forest is described in terms of its desired future condition, which is related to long-term management objectives. As stated in the revised plan, the desired future condition of the State Forest will:

1. Sustain fundamental ecological processes and functions that, in turn support representative, diverse, and productive biological assemblages.
2. Provide for a variety of ecosystem services (see glossary) that help sustain human civilization.
3. Provide for a variety of sustainable human values that are derived from ecosystems, including economic, recreational and intrinsic values.
4. Provide for a variety of forest-based products.

These statements of desired future condition are not in any relative order of priority, since under the principles of ecosystem management the concepts of biological, social and economic uses and values are balanced.

The strategic goals presented in the revised plan are likewise not presented in any order of priority, and again reflect the concepts of ecosystem management.